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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to assist the Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District in determining the reasons that students had for choosing to attend or that forced them to leave Grossmont College (GC) or Cuyamaca College (CC), in El Cajon, California. An open-ended questionnaire was developed to provide the college administration with the broadest view of students' perceptions and intentions. Approximately 350 surveys were distributed to GC and CC students in three cohorts based on course taking patterns: Basic Skills, Transfer, and Vocational. Results of the study, based upon 230 responses from GC students and 114 from CC students, indicated the following: (1) for all students the most commonly cited reason for attending their college was convenience of location; (2) for the three cohorts at GC, price was the second most common reason for attending, while at CC price was the second most common for transfer students and small class size was the second most common among vocational and basic skills students; (3) for all students, fee increases/financial burdens was the most common reason for not continuing, lack of course availability was second, and scheduling problems was third; and (4) at GC, the quality of instructors and the reputation of the college were also often mentioned by students, while at CC the small size of the campus and classes was often mentioned. Data tables are included. (MAB)

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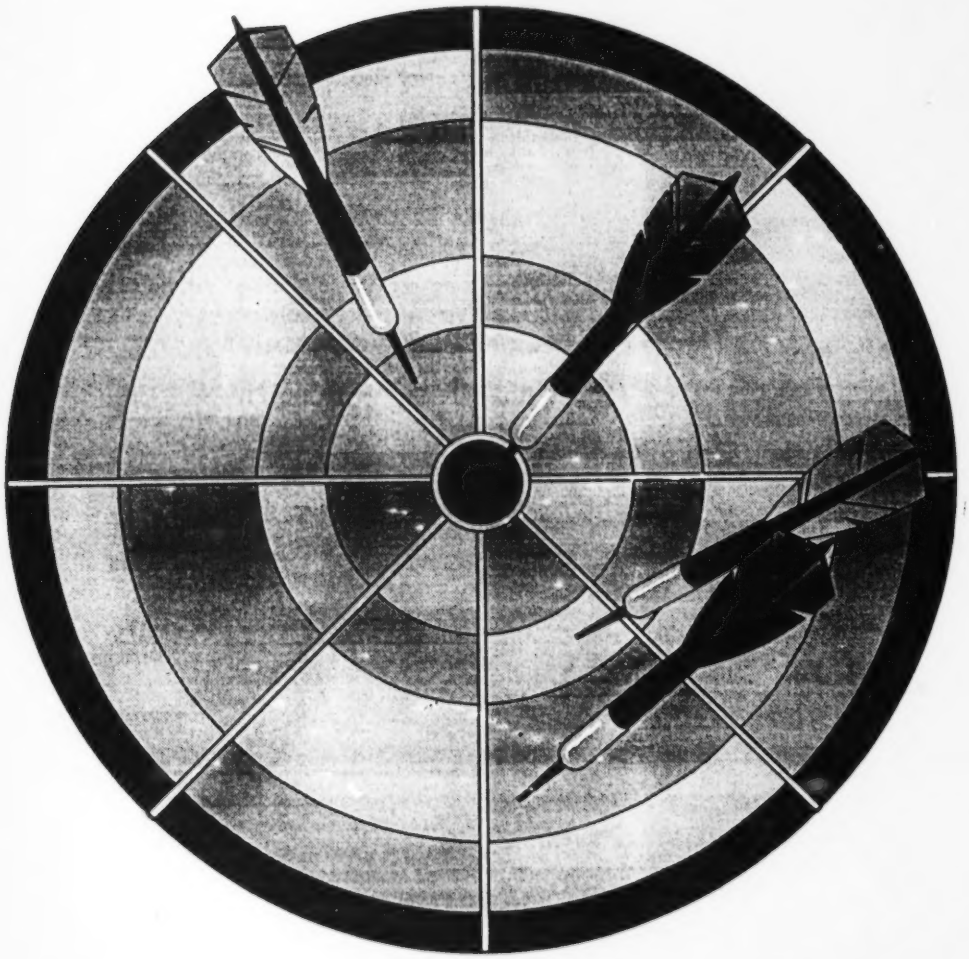
ED 369 455

Preliminary Report:
Student Intentions:
'Why they say they come and why they say they go...'

by
Office of Institutional Research and Planning

Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community Coll. District, El Cajon, CA.

April 15, 1994



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Executive Summary

The purpose of this investigation was to help the Grossmont - Cuyamaca Community College District Administration determine if they were on-target in their assumptions as to why students chose to attend Grossmont or Cuyamaca College, and what factors might cause them to leave.

A survey was distributed by Academic Senate presidents to faculty teaching Transfer, Vocational, and Basic Skills courses at both Grossmont and Cuyamaca for use in their classes. An open-ended survey (N=344) was used in order to gather as much information as possible.

The survey asked students to describe the reasons they choose Grossmont or Cuyamaca College, and what factors would keep them from continuing their course work.

General

- 230 Grossmont and 114 Cuyamaca students participated in the open-ended survey

The following lists the most frequent responses for all groups for the question...

What factors led students to choose Grossmont College?*

- Close to home/location/convenient (61%)
- Price/inexpensive/less than state college (46%)
- Course availability/fulfill GE requirement (29%)
- Nice campus atmosphere (20%)
- High quality instructors (18%)

What factors led students to choose Cuyamaca College?

- Close to home/location/convenient (69%)
- Price/inexpensive/less than state college (52%)
- Small classes/uncrowded (39%)
- Nice campus atmosphere (18%)
- Course availability/fulfill GE requirement (16%)

What factors make it difficult or impossible for students to continue at Grossmont College?

- Fee increases/financial burden (67%)
- Lack of course availability (34%)
- Scheduling problems/conflict (15%)
- Distance (15%)

What factors make it difficult or impossible for students to continue at Cuyamaca College?

- Fee increases/financial burden (60%)
- Lack of course availability (40%)
- Scheduling problems/conflict (21%)

*Percent of respondents. Percentage will be greater than 100% due to multiple responses.

Introduction

The District enrollment committee met in an attempt to determine what factors might be related to our recent decreases in enrollment. In an effort to gain the students' perspective, a study was conducted in an effort to gain an understanding of the reasons students chose Grossmont - Cuyamaca College and the reasons that might keep them from continuing.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was taken for two reasons:

1. This was a preliminary investigation. At this point, qualitative approaches such as open-ended surveys are best because they provide a rich, detailed description of the area of interest. Quantitative approaches employing sampling methodology and statistical analysis are not, as yet, required.

2. An open-ended survey has the potential to provide the college administration with a broad view of students' perceptions and intentions.

Three cohort student groups were selected based on their course taking patterns: Basic Skills, Transfer, and Vocational. Each group was identified through the efforts of the Academic Senate presidents, Peg Hovde (Grossmont) and Jan Ford (Cuyamaca). Each president contacted faculty members that would be willing to distribute surveys in class. An open-ended survey was developed and approximately 350 surveys were given to the Academic Senate presidents for distribution.

Cautions and Limitations: Because this is a qualitative project, the following cautions should be noted:

1. Any weighing of student responses should be viewed with extreme caution due to the lack of sampling procedures utilized.

2. Inferences drawn from this sample using this procedure may be inaccurate, due to small sample sizes.

3. The results of this analysis are best used in combination with other sources of information. By using more than one method of inquiry, an accurate picture of students intentions can best be clarified.

Results

A total of 344 surveys were returned to the Office of Institutional Research and Planning. Of this group, 230 were from Grossmont, 114 were from Cuyamaca. Responses were aggregated by the three cohort groups by college attended. Response categories were developed by the author. The tables below display the top responses by students in the three groups:

Top Reasons for Choosing Grossmont College
Transfer Student Cohort
N=94

Reason Given	Number of Responses
Close to home/location/convenience	56
Price/inexpensive/less than state college	55
Course availability/fulfill GE requirement	26
Nice campus atmosphere	15
High quality courses/instructors	14
Reputation	14

Of the 94 responses, over half listed 'Close to home/location...' and/or 'Price/inexpensive...' as the most important reasons for attending Grossmont College. Course availability was mentioned by almost one third of the respondents. It was surprising to note that a 'nice campus atmosphere' was rated so frequently. Finally, 'high quality courses/instructors and 'reputation' speak to the excellent work of faculty and staff at Grossmont College. If these two responses are combined, they become the third most frequently mentioned reasons for choosing Grossmont College.

Top Reasons for Not Being Able
to Continue at Grossmont College
Transfer Student Cohort
N=94

Reason Given	Number of Responses
Fee increase/financial burden	49
Lack of course availability	33
Book expenses	8
Distance	8
Lack of transportation	7

Almost half of the responses mention 'Fee increase/financial burden' as a reason for not being able to continue their education. Specifically, many of the respondents expressed how tuition increases would make it difficult for students to continue their attendance. What was interesting to note is that based on student feedback, some students clearly felt that tuition increases are a local college decision, rather than a state controlled function. Lack of course availability was mention by about one-third of the students. Book expenses, distance, and transportation also were frequently mentioned.

Top Reasons for Choosing Grossmont College
Vocational Student Cohort
N=61

Reason Given	Number of Responses
Close to home/location/convenience	38
Price/inexpensive/less than state college	27
Course availability/fulfill GE requirement	27
High quality courses/instructors	14
Nice campus atmosphere	12
Reputation	10
Education to better oneself	10

The Vocational students survey responses show a similar response pattern to the Transfer students. However, Vocational students listed 'Education to better oneself' as one of the top reasons for choosing Grossmont. This response category may relate to individuals upgrading job skills or changing careers.

Top Reasons for Not Being Able
to Continue at Grossmont College
Vocational Student Cohort
N=61

Reason Given	Number of Responses
Fee increase/financial burden	46
Lack of course availability	20
Scheduling problems/conflict	20
Lack of transportation	9
Distance	8
Book expense	8

Again, the response pattern of the Vocational students parallels that of the Transfer students, except that 'Scheduling problems/conflict' enters the list tied for the second most frequently mentioned response. It may be this population is cognizant of, or has more difficulties then other groups in scheduling their course work around family and work responsibilities.

Top Reasons for Choosing Grossmont College
Basic Skills Student Cohort
N=75

Reason Given	Number of Responses
Close to home/location/convenience	47
Price/inexpensive/less than state college	24
Nice campus atmosphere	18
Course availability/fulfill GE requirement	14
Special programs/equipment	14
High quality courses/instructors	13

Although Basic Skills students' responses are similar to the Transfer, and Vocational student cohorts, Basic Skills students frequently mentioned the attraction of special programs (vocational programs, TAG agreements) and equipment (computer lab) as reasons for choosing Grossmont College.

Top Reasons for Not Being Able
to Continue at Grossmont College
Basic Skills Student Cohort
N=75

Reason Given	Number of Responses
Fee increase/financial burden	60
Lack of course availability	25
Distance	19
Scheduling problems/conflict	15
Lack of transportation	9

The reasons for Basic Skills students not being able to continue their education are similar to those of both the Transfer and Vocational student respondents. Clearly, most Basic Skills respondents feel that if fees are increased, it would be difficult or impossible for them to continue.

Cuyamaca College Responses

Top Reasons for Choosing Cuyamaca College
Transfer Student Cohort
N=71

Reason Given	Number of Responses
Close to home/location/convenience	53
Price/inexpensive/less than state college	50
Small classes/uncrowded	22
Course availability/fulfill GE requirement	18
Nice campus atmosphere	11

Cuyamaca College Transfer student respondents differed somewhat from their counterparts at Grossmont College. Although 'Close to home/location....,' and 'Price/inexpensive...' occupy the top two positions, over 30% of the Cuyamaca Transfer student respondents listed 'Small classes/uncrowded' as the third highest ranked reason for attending. Clearly, for these respondents, the size and atmosphere of Cuyamaca College is attractive.

Top Reasons for Not Being Able
to Continue at Cuyamaca College
Transfer Student Cohort
N=71

Reason Given	Number of Responses
Fee increase/financial burden	44
Lack of course availability	34
Scheduling problems/conflict	13
Distance	11
Book expense	9

Transfer student respondents at Cuyamaca College had a similar pattern to Grossmont Vocational students' responses.

Top Reasons for Choosing Cuyamaca College
Vocational Student Cohort
N=19

Reason Given	Number of Responses
Close to home/location/convenience	13
Small classes/uncrowded	12
High quality courses/instructors	10
Price/inexpensive/less than state college	4
Nice campus atmosphere	4

Only 19 respondents could be secured from Vocational students at Cuyamaca. This makes the above tabled results extremely suspect, as they came from only one vocational class. The results, however, are somewhat similar to Transfer student responses, except the order of response categories is different. 'Price/inexpensive...' occupies a much lower placement than as indicated by other groups.

Top Reasons for Not Being Able
to Continue at Cuyamaca College
Vocational Student Cohort
N=19

Reason Given	Number of Responses
Fee increase/financial burden	14
Lack of course availability	12
Book expense	6
Scheduling problems/conflict	4

As with all other groups, 'Fee increases/financial burden' was the most frequently mentioned response.

Top Reasons for Choosing Cuyamaca College
Basic Skills Student Cohort
N=24

Reason Given	Number of Responses
Close to home/location/convenience	13
Small classes/uncrowded	10
Education for self improvement	10
Nice campus atmosphere	6
Price/inexpensive/less than state college	5

Because there were so few Basic Skills students responding to the questionnaire, these results must be viewed with caution. As is displayed, it is interesting to note that when compared with other cohort groups, 'Price/inexpensive...' occupies a low position. 'Small classes/uncrowded' is a recurring theme for Cuyamaca student respondents.

Top Reasons for Not Being Able
to Continue at Cuyamaca College
Basic Skills Student Cohort
N=24

Reason Given	Number of Responses
Fee increase/financial burden	10
Lack of transportation	9
Scheduling problems/conflict	7

As with the other groups, 'Fee increases...' holds the top spot, however, unlike the other groups, it was mentioned by less than one-half of the other respondents. Only three responses were listed due to all other response categories dropping to five or fewer.

Conclusions

Overall, it appears that students are attracted to Grossmont and Cuyamaca Colleges because the colleges are close to home, the fees are relatively inexpensive, they can get the appropriate courses they need, and they have a nice atmosphere.

Specifically, for Grossmont College, the quality of the instructors and the reputation of the college is an attractive factor for students. For Cuyamaca College, the small size of the campus and classes make it an attractive place for students to attend.

In regard to the factors making it difficult or impossible for students to attend, increases in fees was universally mentioned by students. Lack of course availability was also a significant factor.

Implications for practice: Student responses to this qualitative survey provides some valuable information on the most significant factors that attract and repel students to Grossmont and Cuyamaca. Using this information, along with other forms of data including census information, focus groups, access trends, and likely legislative change, we can best respond to student concerns and build upon our strengths.